

Commercial Township  
Special Meeting  
February 7, 2024, at 6:00PM  
Commercial Township Hall/Virtual

Mayor Sutton calls meeting to order.

Announcement that the special meeting has been advertised in two newspapers, South Jersey Times and Daily Journal, it is being electronically recorded, and being held in full compliance with the Open Public Meeting Act.

Flag Salute.

In Attendance:

Ronald Sutton Sr.	Mayor
Mike Vizzard	Committeeman
Meghan Wren	Guest Speaker
Heather Miller	Township Clerk
Robert Welch	Township OEM
Clint Miller	Public Works Supervisor

Meghan Wren discusses that the application Commercial Township submitted is just an application and not a guarantee. The application is applied to FEMA to help support the ordinance for flood plain management and flood plain damage protection. It would add efforts to the building code office and help permits for flood plain construction. It would also help the residence understand the risks of floods and where their houses are on the flood maps. It also provides some funding to the Township staff to help with training and plan some activities that are underway.

Meghan hands out a list of Potential Flood Projects.  
She stated that rebuilding the dikes and berms would be astronomical.

Meghan does introductions of people in the room along with the Township Officials.

Elena Gable	Planning Board
Doug Whitiker	County Engineer
Steve Fleetwood	Bivalve Packing
Brian Kempf	FEMA
Sarah Lipuma	FEMA
Robbin Williams	CDM Smith
Ed Nonnenmacher	NJ OEM
Julia Richards	CDM Smith
Joel Dohm	USACE

Meghan calls everyone to come over and look at an interactive map flood zone and berms/dikes in our area.

Meghan - There is a series of dikes that were put together from the South to the West end are all a part of the PSEG Estuary enhance project, and they put up a berm to protect the community from flooding when they put the marsh back into the tidal flow.

Meghan talks about the different places shown on the map where the berms/dikes are in the Township.

Meghan - Commercial Township recently went through a process with the State office of planning advocacy, where they had parts of the Township as working water fronts, and there is a working waterfront node that extends from Bivalve all the way to Shellpile. There has been some discussion back and forth with NJ OEM and the projects they were interested in helping the most were the working waterfront ones.

She stated the Township Hall and Fire Companies are also in places that are potentially vulnerable to floods.

Meghan talks more on the Potential Flood Project List she handed out.

Meghan - The PSEG dike that was over topped by sanding, there was a lot of discussion raising it, but that hasn't happened yet, is that correct?

Committeeman Vizzard- I don't think that has been touched at all.

Meghan - Just looking at that, and trying to bring in partners, that could be something that PSEG could be talked to and that could be the entity that makes that happen.

Committeeman Vizzard- Last I heard they wanted to sell it to us.

Fleetwood- They always have maintained it through the years. I don't know what happened. I told them when they started this project that there needs to be a huge bond put up so that dike could always be maintained because its going to blow, its going to happen. I don't know if that ever got done, and what the status of that is. I mean that is their responsibility. That is a huge undertaking.

Meghan talks more about the map and flood areas.

Doug Whitaker- That's why what Steve (Fleetwood) says is important because I am sure there is some sort of agreement with PSEG with what they are going to build and maintain. If you start changing that, they may not go for it.

Meghan - My question is why was it only built to 8 feet at the time, and not 9? Because as I understand it, it should be 9ft by the flood plain.

Doug Whitaker - That was before my time. Somewhere there should be some legal documents that could spell out why and having them changed stuff might be under the scope of the original agreement.

Meghan - Yeah, it might be, but it is worth a conversation.

More discussion about the PSEG dike and when/how it was built and maintained.

Joel Dohm- Our core engineers have partnered with NJ DEP on the CAP project on both Commercial Township Side and Maurice River Township side. Originally, they started out as two different projects, but we decided to merge them based on hydraulic activity on the Maurice River side. We did go into the 500-year flood plan data, but we are going into the 100 year one. We did not move forward with NJ DEP on the CAP project due to the funding authority that the State of NJ was using did not allow for non-structural, all that the structural stuff that we looked at was so far outside of what would be financially feasible for CAP Project. It had exceeded their federal 15-million-dollar limit very quickly. We have looked at other alternatives. Even if we were going to look at the non-structural, we would have still exceeded the 15-million-dollar threshold. Need to put this into a general investigation study, in which they got a "yes" from DEP to move forward. This will allow the budget to be further than the 15-million-dollar limit and expand to additional areas such as Millville.

Meghan - I know it started out as two CAP Projects, one for Maurice River and One for Commercial, and because the hydrologically it became one. I guess my understanding is that if you were to come up with a structural answer, it would have to be Army Core built, so it could not make use as exciting structures and adding on something that is already there and that is what makes the cost go up. Wouldn't it be worth asking the question, if it could be kept under 15 million if it was kept one community at a time instead of looking at the whole water shed?

Joel- Unfortunately we looked at the flood path and the way the water is flowing, and the way we run the economics, and we cannot just pick and choose the small subsets because that creates an unfair advantage for one community.

Meghan - So is still in the works as a general investigation study, but not being discussed as a priority?

Joel- So what we do is we submit the application, and Congress must come up with better appropriations, then that would come down to the appropriate district. If we got the application in for 2024, all likely hood it takes 3-5 years for it to become a priority choice, and unfortunately, I don't know how those priorities are waved or distributed. It is more along the lines of you bought a ticket, and now you're just waiting in line.

Meghan - There is no guarantee that this will be funded, and in the meantime, there is flooding happening every tide. If there are things that folks can be doing to encourage that to be chosen, that would be great, but we should probably keep talking about other options.

Joel- In reality, yeah, we might be in line for this great prize to happen, but until we are there you must figure out what you are going to do while waiting in line.

Meghan asked Joel if he had collected or created new data to help understand how the water moves in the area. He stated he isn't sure what extent they have for the model, but there is probably information in a H&H Folder or sitting in the engineer's drive. As for the economics information it is on a separate drive since they are no longer in the district, and he would have to dig to retrieve it.

Joel asks about what sewer exists in Port Norris and Shellpile.

Fleetwood- We don't have any of them privileges down here having city sewer and all that stuff, and most of the time, excuse me for being frank but I have been here all of my life, but the water runs off, it is trying to keep it out. Everybody doesn't quite understand the dynamics here and maybe they need to come look around. As a business owner, when I run a business, if I have a problem with something I fix it. I don't spend 10 million dollars to fix every little thing that might have a problem, no, I fix the problem that I have. So, when I go along the waterfront, and I got plenty of it, if I know I'm going to have a problem with a lug bank, I fix the bank. I don't say 'well it is going to take 15 million dollars and I need to build the banks up on all my properties.' No. They don't need to be all built up, just the places that are vulnerable to that flood need fixing, and I'll fix them. You have to understand, this is what so frustrating as a business owner to try to stay in business with all the things we have to deal with now. Now we have to listen to someone now has to study something for 5 years before they can fix something. There are lot of easy fixes, if you give me few million dollars and I build a lot of places that are low here. This town is very much less acceptable to flooding. The river front is different because those people don't have that money to fix the banks. It isn't going to take more than 15 million dollars to fix the river front here on the river.

Joel Dohm- I agree with you.

Steve Fleetwood- That's what I always hear when I talk, "I understand. I agree with your frustration." No one does anything about it, then we keep going to these meetings and hearing the same thing.

Joel Dohm- I'm going to be honest with you, I can't change the planning process, or the engineering process. It is just the way it is. That is why I like to take the regulatory approach, because that is the quickest way to get things done. If I lived down here, I would be talking to Senator Booker or anyone that would give me 5 minutes.

Clint Miller - I have a quick question for you before we move off of this. Joel this is Clint Miller from Commercial township public works. I don't know if you can help direct me, or if you know the answer. We have a lot of ditches in Peak of the Moon, on the meadow side, there are ditches that flow along the edge of the footprint. Over the years we have had materials fall into ditches that stop the water from moving. Would we be allowed to open these areas up? In other words, get the material that fell into it to allow these water ways to move again. We have such a hard time with mosquitos in the summertime. Is that something we must apply for permitting, or can we just reclaim what fell in?

Joel Dohm- Who is the property owner in that area?

Clint Miller- That is the state. I'm not talking about the meadows; I'm just talking about the footprint along the edge. I'm not talking about massive amounts of work here. This is a major issue for mosquitos in the Summertime.

Joel Dohm- Under the assumption the state owns this, as it comes to dredging repairs, I would send a letter to the POC at the state to let them know you want to permit cleaning and repair. Nothing big, just a lengthy paragraph. Do you know who your point of contact is for the state?

Joel also said to them to find out who signed their maintenance permit.

Clint Miller- I do not, I believe her permit runs for 12 years at clip. That is to maintain the levee, berm, I don't know if it has any language about it past that point of term.

Joel Dohm- Yeah, then you should be in there making your repairs as needed. If you are authorized to do it, just let them know where.

Clint Miller- It is the smallest amount of work that could save so much money in the grand scheme of things. The county set a plane down last year, and it didn't do a thing. Okay, thank you!

Meghan goes through the Potential Flood Project List.

They all discussed Dickies Ditch, where it is on the map of Port Norris and where the water comes from. They also discussed certain areas of the ditch that need to be cleaned out. There was a discussion about the State Police repair in Shellpile.

Clint Miller- They took the dock off at the back of the building and tried to stack up a berm, but since the tide has been so bad the last couple days it has the new work has been leaking. That is not because we had any major storms, that is just from the regular tide changes. Years ago, we added a hump of asphalt in the front to keep the water from coming over, and when the tide recedes it goes back out.

Fleetwood- and that only minimized a lot of the road flooding for a while.

Clint Miller- Yes, and we have drainpipes that go to the meadows which has been a big help as well. That whole road has also been repaved.

There is more discussion on Dickies Ditch, how it operates, "little solutions" to help fix the problems, and how it was affected during Hurricane Sandy.

Steve Fleetwood gives his opinion and solutions that would help the flooding in Dickies Ditch with less money they proposed.

Clint Miller- I have to agree with Fleetwood. It is not rocket science to fix Port Norris, and it's not 15 million dollars. It's sitting down with people who know what they are talking about out there and getting the money to help rebuild those berms while doing it right.

Meghan - What we are trying to do here is package a project that meets the brick criteria and maybe it is worth asking Brian from the Brick Program whether putting a package with these berms together is something that is doable. This is coming from a BRIC eligibility perspective.

Brian- Based on what is being described, I believe this is something that does sound eligible. The important thing is that we are capturing all the benefits from the businesses and properties that will be affected by it.

Meghan discusses projects that are going to take up more time and money than others. Also, projects that may or may not be eligible for the BRIC Project.

There is a discussion about the sluice gates and berms in Port Norris and Mauricetown.

Committeeman Vizzard- Yes, the sluice gates need to be repaired. There are multiple of them.

They show on the interactive map Mauricetown. There is discussion about the area, along with the size of the projects that need to be repaired.

Meghan - Brian correct me if I'm wrong, if they are talking about looking at some engineering project for flood control for port Norris, can that's sluice in Mauricetown be incorporated into the plan so that is flood control for commercial township, and not just port Norris,

Vizzard- Yes, that is the perfect way to say that!

Brian- Is this sluice going across the river or is it crossing over the creek bed? I would have to see it whole map to better judge. I think it is small, but I would need a second opinion on that.

Brian also stated that it might run into a permitting issue.

There is discussion about the bulkhead on Highland Street that is failing and the wooden bridge at Miller Avenue.

Meghan mentions the building upgrades needed for Haleyville-Mauricetown School.

Meghan asked Ed if they would be eligible under the BRIC project. Brian stated that he would have to double check with Brian because he is not 100 percent certain. The floodproofing of the structure would fall under FMA. Ed also stated that it is important to reconsider the BCA based on updated home values.

Meghan mentions the Mauricetown Causeway that is not in Commercial Township, but it does affect the Township. She stated there is a halt on that project being a BRIC project because those types of elevation projects do not score well. They are looking into other funding that is available. DOT has funding under PROTECT and that could be a joint project with Maurice River Township. She said it is on the radar for being a very important project since it is a county asset.

Sarah will work on collecting data and working on the BCA. Also start continuing working on the interactive map to show all the projects everyone discussed.

Meghan will meet with Brian to discuss the eligibility of the different projects mentioned.

Meghan will meet with Sarah to help update the projects on the map.

The next meeting will be March 6<sup>th</sup> at 6PM.

The meeting was adjourned.

Submitted by:  
Gabrielle Horseman, Deputy Clerk